

SURFACING THE VOID

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Problem in Lieu of Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2002

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Williamson, Melanie L., Surfacing the Void. Master of Fine Arts (Clay), May 2002, 19 pp.

Surfacing the Void is an exploration of surface design in relationship to the topic of voids. For the purpose of this paper, two types of void were addressed: shelters and hulls. The theme behind the sculptural works dealt with negative spaces as an analogy for the voids in people's lives. The goal was to find a way for the surfaces to elicit an emotional response from the viewer that correlates to the impression of either shelter or hull.

Keeping this in mind, each experiment was approached with how to best represent the meaning of void being manifested. Imagery was applied during different states of the clay: wet, dry, and fired. Methods of exploration included texturing, drawing, stenciling, stamping, incising, decoupage and covering the surfaces with textiles.

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## GLOSSARY

The following definitions of the words void, empty, and hollow were written in my sketchbook two years ago. I added the word Sunyata to my notes after someone pointed out that empty places are not always negative. These definitions from long forgotten sources are the impetus for my work.

**Void-** *adj.* 1. Law- without legal force or effect, not legally binding 2. useless; ineffectually; vain 3. empty; devoid; destitute 4. without contents 5. without an incumbent *n.* 6. an empty space 7. a place without the usual or desired occupant 8. a gap or opening 9. emptiness or vacancy *vt.* 10 to make void or of no effect; invalidate; nullify 11.to empty or discharge (contents); evacuate 12. Archaic- to make empty or vacant 13. Archaic- to clear or rid 14. Archaic- to leave as a place

**Empty-** *adj.* 1. containing nothing 2. vacant, unoccupied 3. without burden or load 4. destitute of some quality 5. without force, effect or significance; unsatisfactory, meaningless 6. Colla. hungry 7. without knowledge or sense; frivolous; foolish *vt.* 8. to make empty; deprive of contents; discharge the contents of *syn-* 1. Empty, vacant, blank- denotes absence of content or contents; 2. Empty means without appropriate or accustomed contents. 3. Vacant is usually applied to that which is

temporarily unoccupied. 4. Blank applies to surfaces free from any marks or lacking appropriate markings, openings 5. hollow 6. delusive 7. vain 8. unload, unburden

**Hollow-** adj- 1. having a hole or cavity within; not solid; empty 2. having a depression or concavity 3. sunken 4. not resonate; dull, muffled or deep 5. without substantial or real worth, vain 6. insincere or false 7. hungry 8. an empty space within anything; a depression or cavity 9. a valley

**Sunyata-** Asian word meaning empty, waiting to be filled

## CLAY TERMINOLOGY

**Bas-relief-** Three dimensional modeling that is raised only slightly above a flat background.

**Bisque-** Usually the first of at least two firings; clay that has been fired to an insoluble but porous state.

**Engobe-** Liquid clay slip colored with metallic earth oxides or glaze stains applied to wet or leather-hard ware for decoration. can be covered by glaze or used alone.

**Extruder-** A mechanical aid for forming moist clay by pressing it through a die. This causes the clay to take the shape of the die. Extruders can form clay quickly into many forms from tubes to tiles to sewer pipes

**Green ware-** Unfired clay that is completely dry and waiting for the first firing (or bisquing) in the kiln

**Grog-** Ground clay varying in coarseness or grit that is added to the claybody to increase strength, quicken drying time, decrease shrinkage, and add texture.

**Intaglio-** Depressed surface decoration, the reverse of bas-relief.

**Leather hard-** Clay that is dry or stiff enough to support itself yet can still be altered through carving, burnishing, or joining slabs.

**Mold-** Any form that can be used to shape clay.

**Mishima-** Carved decoration in leather hard clay, covered with engobe and ribbed off when drier, leaving engobe in the carving.

**Overfire-** To fire a claybody or glaze past its maturing point.

**Oxides-** A combination of an element with oxygen: oxides are used in formulating glazes and clays, can also be used as a stain for the claybody.

**Resist-** A method of applying a covering material such as wax, latex, paper, or organic materials to clay. The resist material will not accept pigment applied to the rest of piece, allowing the area under the resist to remain intact.

**Sagger-** A container in which ware and combustible materials (leaves, flowers, seaweed, wire, cow dung, cat food, etc.) are placed and fired together. The combustibles will create surface effects on the clay.

**Sgraffito-** To scratch through one surface to another; for example scratching through colored slip to a different colored clay body below, or scratching through an unfired glaze to the surface below.

**Slab-** A flat piece of clay rolled out to a uniform thickness from which shapes can be fabricated.

**Slip-** Clay in a very liquid state, may be used in decorating and as "glue" to attach two drier pieces together.

**Stains-** processed and refined raw chemicals yielding ceramic stains offer a wide range of shades for coloring clays and glazes. They are generally more color stable than oxides

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout my exploration of the medium of clay, I have always been fascinated with the interior volume of the pieces. The first items that I created were traditional vessel forms glazed and incised with designs inspired by various ancient cultures. These full-bodied vessels then gave way to goddess forms in which I first began to cut away sections of the body to show the voluminous interior spaces. At this point I felt compelled to fill these cavities with “precious” items that related to the goddess being represented; i.e., the Earth goddess having twigs, moss, sand, and a suspended stone inside. I was much more interested in creating the forms than the surface decoration, so I saggar fired the pieces allowing the process to finish the surfaces.

The goddess series developed and turned into an exploration of “pregnant” vine and tree-trunk inspired female figures. Although these bodies were obviously pregnant, they were also obviously hollow. Leaving the figures headless and open at the neck achieved this goal, as did ripping away sections of the clay to show the empty cavity. Oxides were then rubbed onto these “windows” into the interior, and I applied single color glazes to the surfaces to emphasize the openings.

In striving to better illustrate this feeling of emptiness, I began casting pieces of my own body. These were never fully formed in the round, only three quarter views: front and sides. I again wanted to emphasize the emptiness of the uncompleted form. As an added social commentary in this work, I impressed industrial items (expanded steel,



gears, tools, etc.) and male accouterments (military boot soles, wallet chains, different men's hands, etc.) into the clay. These items symbolized elements that increased my feelings of being devalued as a woman, which in turn created feelings of emptiness. I then rubbed oxides into the impressions to emphasize them, and left the rest of the clay bare.

In order to develop my authentic voice, I began researching contemporary art, taking photos of everything that was intriguing to me, and limiting myself to geometric forms in creating my work. Analyzing the results allowed me to realize that I had several strong interests. I had always been very concerned with the interior spaces created by my forms and I was drawn to multiples. This has developed into my interest in installations.

Empty spaces have been a prominent thread running through most of my previous work, but I have now focused on and am contemplating the concept of void. For me, these voids signify one of two things: a hull or a receptacle. The hull is an empty space that signifies loss. A receptacle is a more positive space, used to deposit items or offer shelter. Careful placement of the forms within an installation format can emphasize the negative space. Depending on the arrangement of forms and the surface treatments, one of these representations of void will be expressed.

#### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Although I felt that the forms I made were strong, I believed that the finished surfaces were unresolved. I had previously concentrated solely on the form; the surfaces were incidental. The focus of my problem in lieu of thesis was to explore how applied surface decoration, text, and imagery could enhance the content of each piece. My

hypothesis was: choice of color, texture, and imagery applied to the surface would facilitate the illustration of void. I focused on how to create surfaces that would enrich the works and the concept of void I chose to express: whether as a hull or a receptacle. Certain colors and surfaces invite, while others repel. Imagery and text can be used to either accentuate the forms or violate them, depending on the application. Keeping this in mind, I approached each experiment with how best to represent the meaning of void I was trying to manifest.

In addressing this problem, I considered the following questions:

1. What type of surface decoration best expresses emotion?
2. How does the placement of imagery, text, or texture on the interior or exterior of the form emphasize my ideas of void?
3. What surface treatments best affect the ideas of void that I want to relate in the pieces?

## METHODOLOGY

In order to explore surface decoration that would enhance my work, I began by creating many small forms on which I ran my tests. On these objects I explored methods of applying imagery in the different states of the clay, wet, dry, and fired. Some methods of exploration were: texturing, drawing, stenciling, stamping, incising, decoupage, along with other methods as they seemed appropriate. I documented and noted every step from idea to completion in my journal. After analyzing which results worked best, I began to make work illustrating those methods. I proposed to make at least five works, in a combination of single pieces and installations. A gallery will show these pieces in an exhibit at the end of this process. The paper documenting the process is the final step.

## CHAPTER 2

### STUDIO INVESTIGATION

#### Wet clay

When I began my studio exploration of this topic, I created a list of methods and ideas I wanted to apply to my work. I then began creating many multiples of the same form, so that I would be allowing the surfaces to be the only difference between each piece. The basic form that I created was a half sphere joined to the center of a square slab. I then cut away the area above where the bowl was located, so that it revealed the hollow of the bowl or void. The four corners were allowed to drape down to stabilize the form. This single form was where I began to explore the ideas of surface decoration in wet clay.

Clay in a plastic state will accept almost any texture. I bought fabric yardage to explore this idea. By pressing the yardage onto the form, you receive a subtle impression, but if you lay the yardage onto the clay and roll it through the slab roller, you get sharp impressions. Some types of material I used in this exploration were lace, corduroy, tulle, netting, canvas, polyester weave, thick wool weave, terrycloth, and hand towels. This idea gave birth to using the same idea with other materials, such as rope, extruded metal, screening, chains, cardboard, bamboo, tree bark, leaves, flowers, and weeds to name a few. At this same time I began stamping items into the clay.

Impressed images are able to be created from a wet plastic state up until leather hard. Along with commercially made stamps that come in a variety of images, textures, and text fonts, I found that using everyday items as stamps are possible. Some items I

used were decorative buttons, coins, medicine bottle caps, coke tabs, corks, thread spools, rings, baby hands and feet, shoe soles, rocks, seashells, the ends of branches, pencils, and tools. Just about anything that has a defined shape or texture can be used as a stamp. I also created my own stamps by carving into pieces of clay, wood, cork, and plastic.

The next area of investigation with wet clay was to use incised lines. I carved into the clay with lines of varying thickness and depth to create images and text. Some of these lines were then filled with colored slips. Related to both stamping and incising, I used cardboard cut outs of paper dolls that I then impressed into the clay, and incised outlines around the piece to make it appear more like a bas-relief.

The next obvious step from taking clay away was to apply more clay. I applied rolled and extruded coils, slabs cut into strips and shapes, and forms that I free formed or created with press molds. These additions were applied in the leather hard state by scratching up the surface, adding slip and joining the pieces together.

A few other experiments were explored that related to the above categorization of adding more clay. I also applied texture by dropping the wet clay into piles of dried clay shavings. Another method of creating texture was to unevenly apply thick slip onto the surface by brushing, throwing, or ragging onto the surface. Sponging the slip onto the surface of the forms created a more subtle and controlled effect.

The final way that I investigated creating surfaces was to apply water in the greenware state. This process is very risky, as most often the form just disintegrated. However, I believe with further exploration the amount of water and water pressure could

be regulated so as to create interesting and distressed looks, without harming the integrity of the entire piece.

### Bisqued Clay

The experiments that I pursued on the bisqued clay dealt with finishing the pieces. I explored different types of glazes; textured, matte, and glossy. I utilized stamps and resists in applying glaze, underglaze, slip, stain, and oxides. Alternative methods of finishing the pieces were also explored. Some of these methods were paint, pigments in wax, decoupage, printer's ink, varnish, shoe polish, graphite, colored pencils, tool dip, flocking, as well as fur and textile coverings.

### FINISHED PIECES

#### *Miss Us Highway 34 South*

The forms for this piece were created after traveling a stretch of highway that was being rebuilt. Many industrial forms were stacked alongside the interstate to be used as support structures in rebuilding sections of the road, and they were beautiful as sculptural objects. These objects inspired me to create four identical forms that were based on a combination of several of the ones that I saw. My finished forms were very industrial in design, so to contrast this, I decided to finish the pieces in a non-industrial manner. I originally thought about using blue and white decals, which would make associations with china patterns. However, the time involved in locating these decals afforded me additional time to think about alternatives.

China patterns still have industrial connotations, so I decided to go even further away from industry by dressing the forms in materials that are very similar to pageant

gowns. This became a very time consuming process. The materials had to be chosen, a pattern had to be created, and I had to learn to sew. I chose two fabrics that were a bright intense blue. One was sequined, and the other had long tinselly fibers or hairs that made the fabric look furry. I did not want these fabrics to lay flat against the hard-edged forms, so I used batting to create some softness and loft to the forms. To finish the edges, I attached white faux fur that is traditionally used as cuffs or collars.

The entire form was not completely covered, as I always treat the interior void differently than the exterior form. Before this piece, I always left the exterior plain, and only applied glaze to the interior, thus in my mind making the interior the focus of the work. While making this installation, I realized that people are not defined by their voids. To reflect this realization, my previous methods were reversed. The void was left in its raw clay state, while the exterior was dressed up.

Many meanings could be assigned to this work. An easy assumption would be that I am making a feminist statement against Beauty Pageant/Trophy Wife stereotypes, saying that they are beautiful on the outside but empty on the inside. Another way of looking at this piece is to think about the strength of the form, and the softness that the coverings infer. Taking this thought further you might come to the conclusion that you cannot tell the strength of an object or a person by the outward appearance. This is another example of how no one can judge the inside by the outside. I thought about these and many other ideas while surfacing these forms, and so they are all true to some extent. However, for me the truest meaning of the work is from my earlier realization. I will not let myself be defined by my void anymore.

### *Trilogy*

*Trilogy* represents my return to a form that I have often repeated in my work. Its shape is based on the Gothic arch. This piece is a wall piece and includes three of these forms. One has a window cut into the front of the piece showing a hollow interior. The second piece looks more as if the window were torn or pulled away, and the interior is no longer empty but has a half sphere attached in the center of the opening, its hollow side down. The third piece is completely enclosed.

I again used a rather nontraditional approach to clay surfaces with these forms. Instead of glaze or other fired finishes, I appropriated materials most often used in other art arenas. Graphite and polyurethane were applied to create the overall background color. This process is very time intensive. To create an even surface, I had to apply many layers of the two materials.

At first, I was applying the graphite, spraying with the varnish, and waiting for it to dry before applying the next layer. Eventually my impatience with this process caused me to apply the graphite while the varnish was still in a sticky state. This caused the graphite to become more like a gel substance that rubbed into the surface much more evenly and reduced the number of layers required.

After treating the exterior, the interior hollows needed to be addressed. In keeping with the non-traditional approach, I decided to use a silver printer's ink. I applied the ink in a watercolor manner so that it was more of a soft glow than a sharp flat surface. Tissue paper then masked the windows dipped into the polyurethane. This treatment of the paper

created an effect that was similar to dried skin or parchment. Finishing the piece required stamping text with black printers' ink onto the graphite and the paper surfaces.

### *Hidden Voids*

In my preparation of this project, I made many forms on which to test surface applications. As I did not want to waste these forms, I decided to recycle them into an installation. I tested several different glazes, and settled on a texture glaze that has variations in color. The glaze is Horsley's Purple Blue, and it is fired to a cone six in an oxidation atmosphere. I sprayed the glaze onto what I had previously considered the backside of the pieces. Every fifth to sixth form, I added a pinch of cobalt into the glaze, so that it would vary even more in color. I thought that it would make the blues more intense, but it actually muted the intensity of the colors. This glaze varied in color from bright purple to electric blue where thickly applied to a light turquoise and acid green where thinnest.

The texture looks identical to flocking, but does not have that soft and comforting feel of fabric. It has the hard gritty feeling of concrete. Each form in this installation invites you to touch it; the colors attract the viewer and the texture makes the fingers itch to caress. However when you actually touch a piece you are surprised; the rough gritty texture works more as a repellent, protecting that hidden or sheltered void.

### *Untitled, Tubes 1*

I often see the same images repeatedly in my mind. Although I sketch them continuously, the only way to make them disappear is actually to make them a reality. This multiple piece installation is the result of my clearing my mind of an image. The



images that I kept seeing were of long and narrow half tubes lined up on a diagonal to a doorway, completely filling a room. In keeping with this project of applied surfaces, I first explored the idea of applying images to these tubes.

Initially I appropriated historical images and combined them with half sentences of text. To emphasize the emptiness one feels when not part of a couple or a family unit, I carved images of two people into the clay, i.e., mothers' with children, or lovers. I then stamped text that did not complete a sentence, such as "would you still love me if I ...". A technique called *mishima* was used to set the images apart from the background. Colored clay was pushed into the crevasses, and when the piece was drier, I scraped the whole thing to leave sharp lines and a flat surface area. Finishing the surface involved stamping objects into oxides and then onto the clay to leave raised rings.

The results were not what I wanted; yet I wasn't ready to give up the idea. I then tried drawing original images into the clay instead of borrowing them from history. The rest of the treatment stayed the same. It was at this point that I realized that it was not the images that were problematic, but the way that they were applied. For the images to be compelling I would have to be more adventurous than simply centering the image within a picture frame. My way of approaching image and mark making is too straightforward. Therefore, my cropping and tilting of the position of these images looked forced and stale.

As a reaction to this analysis, I reversed the direction in which I had been working and removed all images from the surfaces. The finished work involves fifty half tubes. In contrast to the industrial form, I covered the interiors with a green grass colored slip, and

one coat of a low fire glaze that I then over fired to create an aged and distressed satiny finish. The exterior of the form is left raw, and creates interest by the effects of the fire in an uneven reduction atmosphere.

This piece can be arranged in many configurations. All or just a few of the units can be used. I have placed them in many different arrangements; standing on end, stacked in alternating rows of upside down and right side up, alternating each piece in a long row or series of rows, all upside down (with the exterior facing up) or with all but one facing the same way. These pieces can be placed on the floor, on a false floor or pedestal, or even on the wall. One reason that I love using multiples is that not just a single arrangement but also numerous ones work. They reinvent themselves for each space in which they are shown.

### *Reflection*

After working on the previous piece, I felt that I was getting away from my stated problem of surface design. In an effort to get back to the essence of my problem I began a larger scale construction piece. This piece is again based on the Gothic arch form, but has variations to keep it from being a larger replica. The base slab is my traditional shape, but the sides bow out. An extra slab is added to the point where the two sides would come to a point and attach. To keep this new form from being misconstrued as a boat, the heights of each side were kept inconsistent, and the edges were beveled

Thinking about the surfacing of this void and the experiments that I had conducted previously caused me to approach this piece from a new direction. I pressed molded many small and shallow domes, that I then attached in three alternating lines to

the top three-fifths of the interior. A turquoise stain was added to slip and mixed with a low fire glaze, which was then sponged onto the interior to create a soft restful effect. The exterior was once again left raw, showing the unglazed clay.

To finish this piece, I had an industrial Mylar mirror cut to fit the bottom of the piece. This mirror reflects the domes and sponged surface, but also the viewer when they peer in. I prefer this piece set flat with the open end facing upwards, but it is also striking when set on its end and facing outwards. This creates associations with coffins and death, instead of boats and arches. Any of these associations work for me, because they all bring the viewer to a form of reflection.

### *The Strength Comes From Within*

This piece was originally created as a companion piece to *Reflection*. Upon finishing both pieces, I now believe that while they are related, they are both strong enough to stand alone as solo works.

Fabricating this piece took a lot of planning and readjusting. The overall form of the work is of a large cylinder, or a hollow column. In constructing the basic form I ran into several problems. To get the circumference needed for the piece, I had to join two slabs together around a large quikrete tube form. This had inherent difficulties. I would join one side and roll it so that I could work on the other side. This would cause the first join to come apart. After finally joining both sides together, I noticed that the weight of the clay was causing the joins to tear apart slowly. I then tried to stand the clay upright, but the weight again caused adverse reactions. This time the clay began collapsing in on itself. My final solution was to lay the tube down again, repair the cracks that I could, and

wrap the entire piece in a length of canvas. I then wrapped masking tape around the length of the piece from bottom to top.

When I felt that the clay had become closer to leather hard, I unwrapped the tape and canvas to find a new problem. The clay had shrunk more than I had anticipated, therefore locking the tube mold inside. After much pulling, tugging, and pushing I finally freed the clay from the mold only to find that this rough handling had created a new problem. I had split the seams on both sides yet again.

In order to fix this dilemma I began repairing the cracks and thinking about what type of surface should be on this piece. I decided to stay with the industrial style and thought about more half domes, or coils applied to mimic diamond-plated steel. Along these lines a new solution to the side cracks occurred to me. Applying long clay strips along the seams, both inside and out, would help reinforce the piece. After these additions it became necessary to apply strips of clay along the top and bottom of the piece to unify the design.

The surface that I chose to create is a mixture of industrial design and home furnishings. I replicated the pattern of diamond-plated steel, but added half domes to the center of each area where four strips meet. The domes create the added effect of buttons, much the same as an upholstered couch. Although the result is highly decorative, it cannot be easily categorized. Not only does it make the afore mentioned references to industry and the home, but the design of marks applied to the surface also reference my earliest vessels incised with designs inspired by ancient cultures.

The meaning behind this piece is similar to Miss US Highway 34 South in that you cannot judge the strength of a person from their outward appearance. I also want the piece to convey that even if you cannot see anything in the interior that does not mean it is not there. Spiritual strength is invisible to the eye, but recognized between hearts. You cannot always see a physical representation of strength or courage. People can grow stronger from the tragedies that occur in their lives. What may have originally been seen as a gaping void may actually be a shelter that gives strength to one and support for others.

## CHAPTER 3

### ANSWERS TO PROPOSED QUESTIONS

Now that my studio investigation is complete, I would like to address each of the three questions I posed for myself. First I asked what type of surface decoration best expresses emotion. This question is much more difficult to answer than I on. Some who are moved quickly, while others not at all. Personally, I am uncomfortable with outwardly showing emotion, so I tend to suppress it. I have found that this personality trait makes it difficult for me to gauge whether or not the surfaces succeed in eliciting emotion.

Just as viewers bring their own experiences with them to the gallery, they will also bring their own emotions. Emotions and experiences are integrally tied together. Consequently, some people will believe that I have succeeded in charging the pieces with emotion, while others will not. I am in the latter category. I believe that emotion comes from the concept, not the surfaces. Any emotion conveyed through the surfaces may be contributed by an emotional reflection from a past occurrence in the viewer's life. So in answer to what type of surface decoration best expresses emotion, I have to answer that there is not a single type. It depends on who is viewing the work and what has happened in their life.

I next asked how the placement of imagery, text, or texture on the interior or exterior of the form emphasizes my ideas of void. This question was a little easier to answer than the first. I believe that it is possible to invite and repel with both color and

texture. Imagery and text can also fulfill these goals, but they are more dependent on the viewers' experiences.

Continuing to treat the exterior and interior differently caused me to come to a few important realizations. Placing the surface decoration on the exterior takes the focus off the void. The form becomes more important than the negative space that it contains. Reversing this treatment most often works to put the emphasis on the void. However, it can also cause the viewer to spend more time wondering why the exterior was ignored. This seems to be related to the proportion of the void to the exterior form. For the void to remain the focus, the proportion of the void to the exterior surface needs to either be equal, or favor the void. When the exterior takes up more of the visual surface, then it becomes more obvious that it was unaddressed. The more obvious the omission, the more one wonders why.

My final question asks what surface treatments best affected the ideas of void that I wanted to relate? While the same form can represent shelter and hull, it is the level of the implied feeling of comfort associated with the piece that makes it more one than the other. To answer this question I had to deal with generalities.

Many people are attracted to items that appear soft. Not only can the shape of the form imply softness, but also by the addition of textiles, texture, and glaze color or type. Harsh and sharp looking surfaces often do the opposite and repel. So for the purposes of answering this question, I believe that applying soft looking surfaces to a void make it appear to be a shelter. It appears comforting and inviting. When the void is finished with abrasive looking textures, glazes and colors that appear corrosive or feel rough to the

touch, or even by leaving the surface raw, the concept of a hull comes across more clearly.

These are only generalities, for we can all think of shelters that are uncomfortable or hulls that look sleek and inviting. My final observation is that the same negative space can function as both shelter and hull. What may begin as a void with many negative connotations in one's own mind; may be the one thing that can provide solace or shelter to someone else. It is all a question of our experiences and timing. The interpretations will fluctuate with each viewer, and can only be determined by the experiences they bring with them.

## CONCLUSION

While I learned a lot from this exploration, I believe that most of my experiments would not be considered successful in relationship to my sculptural forms. Minimalist in design, my sculptures work better without the overlay of images and text that imply a narrative. However, I have used my research on surface decoration on my more functional forms, and believe that it works quite successfully on them. On the smaller functional items, the images no longer seem narrative but become decorative elements.

In regards to my sculptural forms, there are a few areas of my research that are particularly intriguing. I believe that covering the clay with fabric worked very well, and I plan to explore this idea more fully. Covering the clay with textiles is an exciting and somewhat controversial direction (among ceramicists) to explore. While most methods of surface decoration have been fully explored throughout the history of clay, I could find



only surrealist Meret Oppenheim's fur-covered teacup as an example using fibers over clay.

Many people reacted negatively towards this relatively under investigated method of surface decoration. Potters and other ceramicists seemed most bothered by this combination, and asked why make the form from clay, when it can more easily be fabricated from another material. This is true, and while I feel that the idea of different media deserves further investigation, I first intend to continue my explorations with fibers and clay.

I also really enjoyed discovering a different method of mark making. Traditionally one uses an implement of some type to leave a mark on a surface. Pencils and pens apply pigments onto a surface; styluses and sticks etch into a surface as another way of drawing. By using clay additions as my lines, I could apply marks in a three-dimensional manner. Laying the clay additions onto the surfaces allow the marks to evolve from the forms, instead of looking as if they have been applied afterwards. This type of mark making works well with my forms, seemingly totally integrated and natural.

In conclusion I have realized that I am a maker of forms. Most ceramicists can generally be divided into two groups, fabricators and decorators. Although you must do both, one generally will feel a natural affinity for one or the other. I see images of forms, and enjoy bringing them into reality. Figuring out how I can make a piece, planning the methods and patterns for assembling, and solving construction problems as they develop are the exciting areas of clay for me. Finishing the piece is just the necessary end of the process.

I stated before that I believed the forms I made were strong, but I felt the finished surfaces were unresolved. Now that I have concentrated on the surfaces as much as the forms, I no longer feel that they are incidental. While my previous methods of surfacing were intuitive, they were correct. My forms work best with economical surfaces, without a narrative overlay. I originally believed that the pieces needed to be more emotional, but I now disagree with that theory. It is not vitally important to me if the emotion that I feel while making a piece is the same emotion that a viewer feels while looking at it. My goal as an artist is not to dictate emotion, but to create interesting forms. If the piece is interesting enough for the viewer to stop and look, they will bring their own emotions to the piece.